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ABSTRACT

Two waves of telephone interviews with a sample of 141 voters were used in a study of political communication effects during the 1974 congressional election in the Illinois 24th Congressional District. Seven variables specified by the combined-effects model were derived from the interviews and factor analyzed. Two factors were found and interpreted as direct effects and limited effects. The direct-effects factor included items measuring early and late cognitions about the democratic candidate, mass media exposure, and interpersonal discussion. The second factor, limited effects, consisted of early and late attitudes toward the democratic candidate and intention to vote. The first factor was interpreted as consistent with an agenda-setting model of political communications effects, and both factors were interpreted as consistent with a combined-effects model. (AA)

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A TEST OF THE COMBINED EFFECTS MODEL

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A TEST OF THE
COMBINED EFFECTS MODEL

Introduction

For the past sixteen years, two models have focused polictical communication research. These models are the Influence Model (Sears and Whitney, 1970; Kiesler, Collins and Miller, 1969) and the more recent Agenda-Setting Model (McCombs and Shaw, 1972 and McCombs, 1976). Each of these models are similar in that each is a psychological model finding a commonality in the presupposition that man is a rational human being who maintains psychological balance (Kiesler, Collins and Miller, 1969 and McCombs, 1976). On the other hand, each is different in that each investigates a different part of the psychological organization.

For instance, the Influence Model is an attitudinal Model which finds its presuppositions and hypotheses generated from the P-O-X Consistency Model (Heider, 1946; Sears and Whitney, 1970). This model accounts for three elements in a communication situation, i.e. perceiver, attitudinal object and communication source. The model hypothesizes that the perceiver attempts to maintain consistency among the elements and adjust for assertions made by the communication source.

The Agenda-Setting Model is a cognitive model which states that people do learn issues from the mass media. There are three different types of learning generated from media exposure and media emphasis of topics. These are explained by the Awareness Model, Priorities Model and the Saliency Model. That is, people can learn of an issue, that certain issues have social priorities and that certain issues have social importance. The point is that what is emphasized by the media is "mirrored" in the cognitive organization of the viewers.

Each of these models have been found to be somewhat inadequate in explaining communication effects (i.e. awareness, information, attitude and behavior) in a political campaign. For instance, Klapper's Law of Minimal Consequences has been one of the more consistent explanations generated from the Influence Model. That is, the Law suggest that communications do not have direct effects on attitudes but are mediated by a pletora of intervening variables, i.e. selective processes, predispositions, etc.

Studies examining the subsequent effects of Agenda-Setting have found inconsistent results. Kovenock, Beardsley and Protho (1970) found no evidence that salient agenda items had an impact on candidate choice (Chaffee, 1975). Becker and McLeod (1974) found evidence that salient agenda items had an impact on candidate choice (Chaffee, 1975). While Becker and Towers (1976) found that the cognitive organization did not account for behavior, the attitude structure related to that revised cognitive organization was a better predictor of behavior.

Kimsey (1976) noted the limitations in these models and consequently presented a model which attempted to combine the variables of the above described micro models. He found that both direct and limited effects dimensions operating in the campaign. That is the cognitive dimension accounted for the direct effects of communications, i.e. voters were learning about the candidates and campaign from communications. The attitudinal dimension accounted for the limited effects of communication, i.e. the attitudinal structure was not directly effected by communcations. Thus, Kimsey suggested selective processes were operating in the campaign. Finally, candidate choice was directly effected by the late campaign attitude structure. However, there was a weakness in the Combined Effects Model, such that it was an underidentified model (Duncan, 1975).

Noting the weakness of the initial Combined Effects Model, Kimsey and Atwood (1976) added an additional variable to the model, i.e. party identification. With the additional variable included in the model, both direct and limited effects dimensions were found. However, the second model indicated that not only was late campaign attitude having a direct effect but also party identification had a direct effect on candidate choice.

It is the purpose of this paper to examine the relationship between direct effects (communications-cognitions) and limited effects (attitude-behavior). That is, do the variables in the Combined Effects Model consistently account for both direct and limited effects? If so, then it is expected that two factors will

be found. One factor will consist of cognition and communication variables while a second factor will consist of attitude and behavioral intent variables. The following discusses the methodology.

Methodology

The variables for this study were the same variables as set forth in the Combined Effects Model. These variables are:

X1 . . . . Early Cognitions About Democratic Candidate
X2 . . . . Early Attitude Toward Democratic Candidate
X3 . . . . Mass Media Exposure
X4 . . . . Interpersonal Communication
X5 . . . . Late Cognitions About Democratic Candidate
X6 . . . . Late Attitude Toward Democratic Candidate
X7 . . . . Intention To Vote

These variables were measured by the following questions. (1) Is there anything about Paul Simon the Democratic Candidate that might make you want to vote for him? (2) Is there anything about Paul Simon the Democratic Candidate that might make you want to vote against him?

Cognitions was defined as the sum of items for both questions (c=1+d, score could be 0 to 8) while attitude was the difference between the number of likes and dislikes (a=1-d, score could be -4 to +4). Pomper (1975) notes similar use of these questions.

Mass Media exposure was measured by asking the respondent what he has seen, heard or read in either television, newspapers or radio. Mass Media Exposure was the sum of these items.

Interpersonal Discussion was measured by asking the respondent if he has had any conversaitons with friends, family or co-workers.

Interpersonal Discussion was the sum of these items.

Intention To Vote was measured by asking the respondent, "If the election was held today, for which candidate would you vote?" The following describes the sample.

The data used in this study were gathered in a study of the 1974 Congressional Election in the Illinois 24th Congressional District. The sample consisted of 500 subjects selected at random from the telephone directories of the five counties comprising over sixty percent of the population of the district, the sample was stratified proportionally by county. The respondents were interviewed by telephone at two points in time. Only individuals who reported that they were registered voters and who indicated they intended to vote were interviewed. Time one occurred during the first week of October, 1974 and time two occurred during the week preceeding the election on November 5. Of the original sample drawn, 141 subjects provided complete data on both waves. The telephone interviews averaged 12 minutes in length.

Factor analysis was used for extracting dimensions of the seven variables taken from the "Combined Effects Model." Prior to factor analysis, the seven variables were normalized. Common Factor Analysis Model was used with squared multiple correlations in the principal diagonal. The following discusses the results.

Results

Factor analysis with oblique rotation was used on the seven variables. Criteria for factor extraction was: (a) an eigenvalue of 1.00, (b) Scree Test, (c) Common Variance Test and (d) Humphrey's Test of Meaningful Factors. The results for this factor analysis are presented in Table 1.

TABLE 1

Seven Variable Factor Analysis

Var	Factor 1	Factor 2
1	.62	-0.04
2	.27	.42
3	.54	.01
6	-0.10	.72
5	.45	.02
4	.46	-0.17
7	-0.02	.54
% of variance	31.11	11.10
Total variance accounted:	42.21	
Factor Correlation	-.52	

Humphrey's Test of Meaningful Factors suggested that two factor extraction was the best solution while the eigenvalue criteria suggested a one factor solution. Scree Test suggested four factors and Common Variance Test indicated three factor solution. After examining three and four factor solutions respectively, a two factor solution was the best solution.

Factor 1 was labeled "Direct Effects." Four items loaded on this factor with total accounting for 31.11 percent of the variance. Factor 2 was labeled "Limited Effects." Three items loaded on this factor with a total accounting for 11.10 percent of the variance. These seven variables accounted for 42.21 percent of the total variance. The following is a discussion of the results.

Discussion and Conclusions

These results are interesting because they support the findings of the Agenda-Setting Model (McCombs, 1976) and the Combined Effects Model (Kimsey, 1976). For instance, factor analysis suggested a two factor solution was best. Factor One consisted of Pre and Post Cognitions About Democratic Candidate, Mass Media Exposure and Interpersonal Discussion. Agenda-Setting researchers have found a consistent set of findings which suggest that mass media and interpersonal discussion have a direct effect on the psychological agenda, i.e. people do learn from the mass media. The Direct Effects Dimension of this study supports those findings.

On the other hand, the Limited Effects Dimension supports the findings of the Influence Model. For instance, the Limited Effects Dimension consists of Pre and Post Attitude Toward Democratic Candidate and Intention To Vote. This attitude-intention to behave dimension is consistent with the findings of attitude and behavior research. That is, attitudes are better predictors of behavior and behavioral intent than cognitions. The Limited Effects Dimension

of this study supports those findings. It does suggest that the attitude structure was relatively stable across time and was inversely related to the cognitive organization. This suggest that the more information assimilated in the cognitive oganization the more negative the attitude toward the candidate.

These two dimensions are consistent with the findings of the Combined Effects Model. Kimsey (1976) found these two dimensions to operate simultaneously in the Combined Effects Model. This suggest that people do learn about the candidate and his campaign, while the attitude structure is relatively unaffected by communications. This is consistent with other findings which have indicated that this congressional campaign had more of a reinforcement than persuasion effect (Kimsey and Atwood, 1976).

More importantly, most Mass/Political Communication Research has traditionally examined these two dimensions independently, i.e. Direct-Limited Effects controversy (Sanders, 1975). The Combined Effects' findings and those found in this study suggest these dimensions function simultaneously. This researcher suggests more research which attempts to account for both direct and limited effects within the same model or in the Combined Effects Model as presented by Kimsey (1976).

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